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ABSTRACT

A Study was conducted to investigate education for the handicapped in Saudi Arabian schools. The rationale for special education, the infrastructure, and student population were analyzed. Services were found to be available for the physically handicapped and mentally retarded. Findings also indicated that in the implementation of special education, the school systems seem free of the problems which plague other nations. Small classes were maintained, and the sexes were segregated. No financial problems seemed evident. There was a need for trained personnel and research. Future plans included expanding the services of special education. (SBH)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

by

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Presented at the First World Congress on Future Special Education
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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

No comprehensive study has been made on the status of special education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This study deals with the education for the handicapped in Saudi schools. The rationale for special education, the infrastructure, and student population were analyzed. Services are available for the physically handicapped and mentally retarded. Findings also indicate that in the implementation of special education the school systems seem free of the problems which plague other nations. Small classes are maintained, and the sexes are segregated. No financial problems seem evident. There is a need for trained personnel and for research. Future plans include expanding the services of special education.

Special Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The handicapped constitute a special category for which Islam has traditionally been particularly solicitous since the Holy Qu'ran repeatedly enjoins on man responsibility for his brethren. Respect for Qur'anic principles then lies behind Saudi Arabia's concern for the handicapped. Abd-el Wassie (1970) succinctly summarizes these principles, "The principles of Islam assume that all will be given equal opportunities to benefit from education, medical care and the social and economic life of the community and it is in accord with these principles that the Government of Saudi Arabia has endeavoured to make provision for the blind and the deaf and dumb."

Educational Rights of the Handicapped

Although Saudi Arabia is a young country, the rights for education of the handicapped are centuries old. The government of Saudi Arabia has already implemented many of the educational rights of the handicapped that were championed in the Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (Sundberg, 1974) and more recently the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The following are inalienable rights of the handicapped which are provided as an integral part of the comprehensive development policy (Dunipace et al 1977).

The right to free education. The Department of Special Education provides all facilities necessary for the education of the handicapped: buildings, audio-visual equipment, books etc. In addition, the students are entitled to free transportation from their homes to the various institutes.

The right to free medical services. One of the greatest benefits is free medical treatment and medicine which is available to all the handicapped at the health centers.

The right to financial support. The handicapped receive a small monthly grant throughout their training.

In addition to the above rights, the Saudi Arabian government makes special provisions for the care of the handicapped.

Classes are small; at the institute for the mentally retarded the maximum number of students in any house or class is five. With deaf children the class range is from five to ten children.

Early childhood programs are provided for the retarded and deaf children between 4-6 years of age.

Prevalence

Presently the government is concentrating in the areas of the blind, deaf and retarded who are probably severely handicapped. Of the nation's total school-age children (865,545) 1784 handicapped or 0.21% were receiving special education during the school year 1974-75 (Ministry of Education, 1974/75). More recent statistics (October 1977) results in a higher percentage. From a total school population of 652,474, females excluded, there were 1690 handicapped or 0.26%.

From Table 1 one assumes that only children with severe handicaps are served; there is no information as to what criteria were used for each of the three categories. The highest prevalence group is the blind being about four times greater than 0.03%--which is the accepted medico-legal estimate--estimated by the United States Office of Education. The high rate of prevalence is perhaps due to the fact that the government has focused attention on eye diseases.

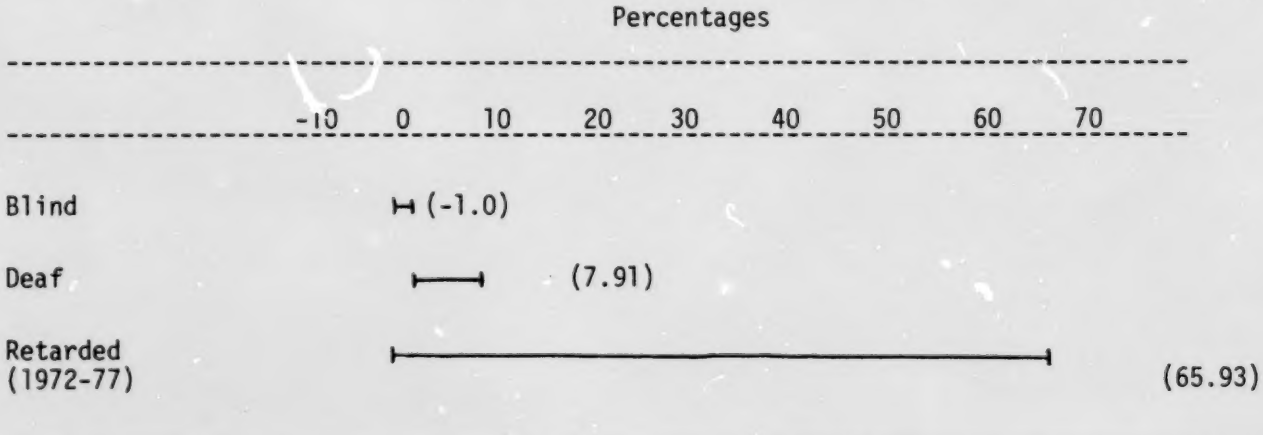
With the retarded the discrepancy is great, comparing 0.02% with 0.3% estimated by USOE. The program for the retarded is relatively new starting in 1972, and perhaps children of this type have not been identified yet.

Table 1. Prevalence estimate of total schoolage children classified handicapped.

Handicaps	Saudi Ministry of Education 1974-1975	USOE (Dunn, 1963)
Blind	0.11%	0.03%
Deaf	0.07%	0.1%
Retarded	0.02%	0.3%

Growth in the number of children served during a twelve year period (1965-1977) shows both an increase and a regression. (See Figure 1). Results seem to be the inverse of the prevalence. The retarded who had the lowest incidence show an increase of 65.93%, though estimate is for 1972-1977. The blind on the other hand who had the highest prevalence now show a regression.

Figure 1. Percentage increase in handicapped Children during 1965-1977. (Ministry of Education, 1974-75 and 1977)



Objectives

In educating the handicapped the Ministry of Education, through the Department of Special Education, has set three major objectives: to provide educational, social, and vocational programs with the ultimate goal that the individual attains social maturity and training so he can become an effective, integral part of society.

Institutes for the Handicapped

To carry out these objectives it was necessary to establish institutes for the various handicaps. Schools span all the provinces except the northern province. As of October 1977 the Statistical Summaries on Education listed 52 schools. Historically, this seems to be quite an accomplishment considering that in 1958 the first evening institute for the blind was established with an enrollment of one hundred students. During the day they attended religious institutes, and in the evening they received instruction in Braille and vocaional training. In 1960 the institute came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Soon after that in 1962 the Department of Special Education was established.

Most of the institutes are for day students although some make provisions for boarding sections for the handicapped who are faced with hard social circumstances and physical disabilities. Institutes are staffed by administrators and teachers in addition to each institute having a social worker and a full-time nurse.

School Programs

The educational programs for the handicapped are not dis- ~~(line missing)~~ similar from those of general education for the normal child, as to levels, years of study, and equivalence certificates.

In all institutes two approaches to curriculum are provided: (1) General Education. Almost all institutes comprise a section for three levels, elementary, intermediate and secondary. ~~(See Table 3.)~~ Graduates of general education take

an examination for a Secondary Education Certificate Examination and are awarded general certificates similar to those of general education. (2) Vocational Training. A certain amount of general education is included in this program with emphasis on vocational training in cane work, weaving or household equipment. Vocational diplomas are awarded to those enrolled in the vocational training program. A unique aspect of those graduating from vocational training is that vocational rehabilitation services are provided with job placement in a sheltered workshop or they are helped in carrying out vocational projects either individually or collectively.

Whether the handicapped is enrolled in the general education program or the vocational training program there are therapy programs for the blind and deaf. Little is known of the rehabilitative procedures for these handicapped children except that for the deaf the program of aural rehabilitation is through the auditory training equipment such as a desk hearing aid. For the blind the media used is the braille. Great stress is laid on the programs for the blind. The graduates of Al-Nour Institutes for the Blind are the only ones having access to higher education.

A major contribution in the educational programs for the retarded as well as the deaf are the early education programs in an effort to reduce the severity of handicapping conditions. The education starts at the age of four and continues until the child is six. Everything is done as far as possible on an individual basis, classes or houses having no more than five students each.

Although great emphasis is placed on academics in the area of the blind and graduates of the Al-Nour Institutes are entitled to higher education, the percentage of blind is greater in vocational training. (See Table 2). Conversely, the

retarded have a higher percentage enrolled in the academic courses with only 1.46 per cent in the vocational training program. The deaf also have a higher percentage enrolled in the academic area, but it is only to the elementary level. ~~(See Table 3.)~~ It seems the deaf's general education could be extended to include at least intermediate and later high school education. Deaf students have the intelligence to do high school work and some even enter college (Dunn, 1963).

Table 2. Handicapped enrolled in educational programs and vocational training. (Ministry of Education, 1974-75)

	Percentages	
	Education	Vocational
Blind	21.97	32.85
Deaf	28.36	4.82
Retarded	10.54	1.46

Supervision of Institutes

Of great significance is the implementation of the school programs at the institutes. Since the school systems are centralized the Ministry of Education has a strict supervision system. Each inspector visits the school three times, the first time to give instruction and the second and third to check their application and assess the standard of the pupils.

Professional Services

Of the difficulties involved in the rapid expansion of education the most acute and frustrating shortage is the lack of trained personnel. In special education for the year 1974-75, for example, 44.27% constituted non-Saudi teachers while a little over half (58.60%) were non-Saudi administrators. Egypt provided the largest

non-Saudi manpower, most being on a personal contract (Ministry of Education, 1977).

Even more important is the quality of teachers in the education and administration of the handicapped programs. Table 3 shows that the majority of teachers hold elementary certificates (30.19%). Those with secondary training and bachelor's degrees are next while a mere 0.77% are holders of a Master's degree. Again one sees the dependence on non-Saudi teachers. The Saudis constitute 7.69% of those with degrees while almost twice as many (14.23%) are non-saudis with degrees. Conversely the Saudis constitute 48.46% of those with undergraduate diplomas down to elementary certificate holders.

Table 3. Total Saudi and Non-Saudi Teachers (Ministry of Education, 1974-75)

	Percentages
Master's degree	0.77
Post graduate diploma	1.73
Bachelor's degree	19.42
Undergraduate diploma	20
Teacher training secondary level or less	6.54
Secondary	19.23
General Intermediate	2.11
Elementary	30.19

Within the administration there is another contingent of administrators. It is interesting to note that the two non-Saudi psychologists are assigned to the Institute for the retarded, and the doctor is assigned to the Institutes of the Blind. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Saudi and Non-Saudi Administrators (Ministry of Education, 1974-75)

Professions	Number		
	Saudi	Non-Saudi	Total
Psychologists		2	2
Educational Supervisors	4	2	6
Vocational Supervisors	1	8	9
Health Supervisors	2	10	12
Doctors		1	1
Social Supervisors	1	16	17
Deputy Principals	11	1	12
Principals	14		14

In order to replace the non-Saudi personnel and to have better qualified teachers and administrators the government has established Teacher Training Institutes. In the field of Special Education there are several centers for teacher training for those who have been selected as teachers of the handicapped. Fellowships for advance training abroad are also available by the Department of Special Education.

The Future

In the book, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the last chapter is devoted to "The Future", and for the Kingdom the future is exceptionally bright. In the Second-Five Year Development Plan (1975-1980) one of the fundamental principles set out in the plan was "To develop human resources by education, training and raising standards of health". By 1980 the Kingdom will be devoting twenty-five percent of its resources to education. There is to be an expansion in schools and institutes, enrollment, curriculum reform; and change in teacher training methods from rote learning to new techniques involving critical and analytical thinking. Another aim will be to provide the nation with 25,000 university graduates by 1980 (Dunipace et al. 1977).

Since the philosophy of respect for Qu'ranic principles lies behind Saudi Arabia's concern for the severely handicapped, "In shallah"--as one frequently hears in the Middle East--there will be an inclusion in the programs of children with other handicaps for the commitment to all the people of Saudi Arabia is that they will have access to education and training at all levels.

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